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ABSTRACT

The Center for Remediation Design and Brandeis University (Massachusetts) conducted a series of telephone interviews to develop a manual of assessment for Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) youth programs. These interviews were conducted with youth planners in each service delivery area during August 1987. The goal of this project was to explore common practices, what JTPA programs are doing about basic skills assessment, and what the stress points and vital signs are. A total of 150 programs out of an original randomly selected sample of 205 participated. The report from the field is encouraging with regard to the advances made toward incorporating basic education skills and refining assessment in the absence of specific guidance or training. The assessment information generated from these tests was used for a combination of purposes: (1) to appraise basic skills; (2) to diagnose where learning should begin; (3) for benchmarking purposes; and (4) as a posttest to certify attainment. The most common practice was the use of standardized tests for pre and post data collection; 92% of the sample administered standardized tests. The most common additional assessment strategy was the intake interview. When asked about issues or problems, all staff regarded the lack of staff training in assessment and instruction, motivation and lack of incentives for participants, attendance and retention, and lack of cooperation from the school system as real problems. (The survey and survey results are included. Part 1 addresses basic skills remediation in JTPA youth programs and part 2 addresses JTPA assessments strategies: identifying issues and instruments. In addition, an appendix lists the 150 randomly selected programs used for this study.) (NLA)

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Monograph Series

SURVEY OF BASIC SKILLS REMEDIATION PRACTICES IN JTPA YOUTH PROGRAMS

Prepared by the Center for Remediation Design; a project of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Private Industry Councils, the National Job Training Partnership, the National Association of Counties, and the National Alliance of Business

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Introduction

To respond to the needs of the JTPA system, the Center for Remediation Design, together with Brandeis University, conducted a series of telephone interviews as part of the development of a manual of assessment for JTPA Youth programs. These interviews were conducted with youth "planners" in each service delivery areas administrative entity at the end of August 1987. Simply, the goal was to explore common practices, what most JTPA programs were doing about basic skills assessment now, and what were the stress points and vital signs. A total of 150 programs out of an originally randomly selected sample of 205 participated.

Overall, the report from the field is encouraging, at times even surprising, with regard to the advances made toward incorporating basic education skills and refining assessment in the absence of specific guidance or training. For example, nearly 70% of the programs sampled provided basic skills remediation both in summer and during the school year, 28% during the summer only. Most programs used a variety of instructional techniques, but among the most impressive findings is that more than 70% of the programs now use computers as teaching tools, nearly 75% employ genuine individualized competency-based techniques and nearly 60% tied basic skills instruction to work experience; thereby modeling some of the most critical elements of effective programs for at-risk youth. Eighty-five percent of the programs explained that basic skills remediation was a function of their JTPA youth employment competency system and when asked how competency gains were measured nearly 25% reported using grade level advances followed closely by 21% reporting criterion — referenced or functional skill gains (often to supplement not replace grade level scores). Others reported defining attainment through some combination of grade level scores and G.E.D. test scores.

The single most revealing question with regard to who's doing what with assessment -- both in the summer and year round programs -- turned out to be "what tests(s) do you use?" Of those programs administering standardized tests (92% of the sample), the following emerged as the most commonly used:

Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)	Used by more than 39% of programs
California Achievement Test (CAT)	Used by more than 22% of programs
Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)	Used by nearly 17% of programs
Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE)	Used by nearly 10% of programs

The assessment information generated from these tests was used for a combination of purposes including: 1) to appraise basic skills in order to sort youth and assign them to appropriate programs (35% of programs); 2) to diagnose where learning should begin within a defined level (70% of programs); 3) for benchmarking progress (31% of programs); and 4) as a post-test to certify attainment or gain (66% of programs). One can infer that the most common practice is the use of standardized tests for pre- and post-data collection. The most common additional assessment strategy used was the intake interview which was used by 45% of the respondents. When

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asked about issues or problems in implementing effective basic skills remediation programs under JTPA, without exception all practitioners digressed from the interview protocol to indicated that they regarded the lack of staff training in assessment and instruction as a real problem, the next most often mentioned problems included "motivation and lack of incentives for participants," "attendance and retention" and "lack of cooperation from the school system." These four problems are also regularly raised by participants attending The Center for Remediation Design's Institutes on Basic Skills.

Methodology

The survey was conducted during August 1987. The summary that follows reports on 150 programs out of an originally randomly selected sample of 205. (This sample was developed by taking every third SDA on an alphabetized list of approximately 610 SDA administrative entities). The attached appendix shows the distribution of the sample together with the number of responses state by state. If no bias was introduced by the sample not being completed, the sample size is probably adequate for the purpose intended (with an error of not more that 8% at the 95% level of confidence). There does not seem to be any obvious variation of responses among states. Many states had only one respondent and comparison is therefore undependable. The one broad comment which can be made is that the variation of responses within states depends mainly upon the number of respondents within the state.

The interviewers asked to speak to the person in charge of the SDA's youth program. First contacts were not usually well informed about the programs in force. Further referrals (often as many as seven) proved to be of greater help and were more enthusiastic about programming efforts. As a rule, JTPA program operators tended to have more information than the SDA or the PIC contacts.

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The Survey and the Results

Part I

BASIC SKILLS REMEDIATION IN JTPA YOUTH PROGRAMS

1. Do you provide basic skills remediation for JTPA youth?

_____ yes, summer only (IIB)
_____ yes, school year only
_____ yes, both summer and school-year
_____ no

69.3% of the programs sampled provide basic skills remediation both in summer and during the school year, 28% during the summer only and 2% during the school year only. (One response was not available.)

2. Who is served in your program(s)? (Check all applicable.)

_____ in-school youth
_____ dropouts
_____ high school graduates

Programs typically serve youth who are still in school, together with others no longer in school - this combination represents 92% of the sample. Other target groups for service were all encompassing:

- 68% of the sample had programs which served 'in school' youth, dropouts, and high school graduates;
- 16.6% served 'in school' youth and dropouts;
- 2% served 'in school' youth and high school graduates; and
- 7.3% served 'in school' youth only.

One response was not available and the remaining 2.6% of the sample offered programs to dropouts and high school graduates only.

3. Describe your program's instructional technique. (Check all applicable.)

_____ group instruction
_____ individual/self-paced
_____ competency-based
_____ computers are used as teaching tools
_____ instruction is specifically tied to work experience
_____ instruction is specifically tied to skills training

Most programs used a variety of instructional techniques varied by program and client need such as:

- 70.7% used computers as teaching tools (to any extent);
- 74% used competency based techniques;
- 57.3% tied instruction to work experience;
- 53.3% tied instruction to skills training;
- 73.3% used individual/self paced techniques; and
- 73.3% used group instruction.

The most common combination of techniques was to use all of them - this was the case for 24.7% of respondents. The next most common combination of techniques was to use group instruction, individual/self-paced instruction, competency based instruction and computers as teaching tools - this combination was used by 9.3% of respondents.

4. How would you rate the results of your program?

_____ Excellent _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor

Perhaps predictably, respondents rated their program results very highly. (Subjective judgments of "excellent", "good" etc. were used:)

- 27.6% claimed to have excellent results;
- 57.7% reported good results;
- 5.3% reported fair results;
- one respondent (0.7% of the sample) reported poor results; and
- 8.7% of the sample gave no response.

5. How is your <u>remediation</u> program funded?

_____ JTPA 8%
_____ JTPA IIA
_____ JTPA IIB
_____ other (please be specific)

Funding for the programs most typically came from JTPA exclusively and were usually derived from a combination of sources:

- <u>2.7% were funded from JTPA 8% only</u>;
- <u>8.7% were funded from JTPA IIA only</u>;
- <u>28.7% were funded from JTPA II B only</u>;
- <u>29.3% were funded from a combination which included JTPA 8%</u>;
- 58.7% were fund from a combination which included JTPA IIA;
- 86% were funded from a combination which included JTPA IIB; and
- the most common combination was that of JTPA IIA and JTPA IIB which was used by 30.7% of respondents.

6. Is your remediation program linked to a JTPA youth competency system? If yes: are competency gains measured by grade level scores? Functional skill gains? GED test?

85% of the programs were linked to a JTPA youth competency system. Of these, the most common procedure for defining outcome or attainment was:

- grade level scores - 24.3%;
- functional skill gains - 21.3%; and
- a combination of grade level scores and GED test - 13.3%.

No other option was used by more than 10% of the sample.

7. What do you see as the three biggest problems in providing remediation to youth in your programs? (Topics to be covered in the paper.)

Most respondents mentioned more than one problem in providing remediation. The most often mentioned problems were "motivation and type of incentive programs" and "remediation problems and attendance" (32.7% of respondents - 14% mentioned only this problem). Other significant problems were:

- 16.7% mentioned "role clarification of JTPA vs school responsibilities for youth";
- 15.3% mentioned "lack of cooperation from school system";
- 13.3% mentioned recruitment;
- 12% mentioned rural county problems; and
- 10.7% mentioned transportation.

No other problem was mentioned by more than 10% of respondents.

Part II

JTPA ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES: IDENTIFYING ISSUES & INSTRUMENTS

8. Do you provide formal testing for youth in remediation in IIA? in IIB? (Standardized.)

92% of the programs provided formal testing for youth in remediation.

9. If you administer a formal test(s) what do you use in IIA? in IIB? (List all that apply.)

Of those JTPA programs which administer formal tests themselves (as opposed to the school system) the following emerged as the most commonly used:

- TABE is used by 39.3% of programs;
- CAT is used by 22.7% of programs;
- WRAT is used by 16.7% of programs;
- ABLE is used by 9.3% of programs; and
- 7.3% of tests used were self made.

None of the other tests mentioned were used by more than four respondents (2.7% of the sample).

10. How do you use assessment information?

Test	to sort	to diagnose	for progress checks	credentialing

Assessment information for a combination of purposes by most programs were:

- 34.7% used it to sort youth into groups (appraisal);
- 68.7% used it to diagnose where learning should begin within a defined level;
- 30.7% used it for progress checks (benchmarking); and
- 66% used it for certifying attainment.

11. What other assessment strategies besides tests do you use? Intake interview? Performance reviews (behavior observation)? Product development? Other?

The most common additional assessment strategy used was the intake

interview, which was used by 44.7% of respondents. None of the other strategies, or combination of strategies was used by more than 10% of respondents.

12. Do you use information from other sources? If yes, what tests? What sources (i.e., schools)?

Information from schools was the only other commonly mentioned source of information. No other source was mentioned by more than one program - 95.3% of respondents mentioned school as an information source.

Appendix*

State	No. in Sample	No. of Responses (no. of persons spoken to)
Alaska	1	1
Alabama	1	1
Arkansas	2	3
Arizona	5	6
California	15	17
Colorado	3	4
Connecticut	3	4
Florida	6	8
Georgia	4	6
Hawaii	1	2
Iowa	5	5
Idaho	0	2
Illinois	3	8
Indiana	6	6
Kansas	2	2
Kentucky	2	3
Louisiana	3	6
Massachusetts	5	5
Maryland	4	4
Michigan	6	8
Minnesota	2	6
Missouri	2	5
Montana	1	1
North Carolina	9	9
Nebraska	1	1
New Hampshire	0	1
New Jersey	6	6
New Mexico	0	1
New York	11	11
Ohio	6	10
Oklahoma	1	4
Oregon	2	2
Pennsylvania	8	10
Puerto Rico	1	1
Rhode Island	1	1
Tennessee	2	5
Texas	5	11
Utah	3	3
Virginia	4	4
Vermont	1	1
Washington	3	4
Wisconsin	3	6
West Virginia	0	1

* A randomly selected sample of 150 programs was used for this study. This was developed by taking every third SDA on an alphabetized list of approximately 610 SDA administrative entities.